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SUBJECT: PAKISTAN EARTHQUAKE: THE SITUATION IN KOHISTAN

11. Summary: Southern Kohistan fared somewhat better than neighboring provinces during the October 8 earthquake with only two subdistricts affected and comparatively less damage.

In terms of assistance, however, the 50-55% of the affected areas, population left homeless have fared far worse. Only limited assistance has reached the area and corruption at the local and provincial government level has diverted needed resources. International and national NGOs are entirely absent in the district, Pattan subdistrict, and even the Islamist parties, which enjoy broad support in the district, have not initiated relief camps. The Pakistan army is cognizant of the lack of aid, and has promised to divert additional resources, particularly shelter, to the area. Officials, however, stress that their impact will be limited without additional support from the UN and international NGOs. End Summary.

12. OIC, Emboff, and A/RSO visited the Pattan subdistrict in southern Kohistan on November 15 to review damage and assess relief and recovery operations in the area. The earthquake in southern Kohistan was relatively less severe than in other areas of NWFP. Most damage that we observed was caused by landslides that were triggered by the initial quake as opposed to the outright collapse of buildings that we have witnessed elsewhere. While deaths were reportedly minimal (locals who are familiar with landslides took evasive action in the minutes after the quake which probably saved lives), injuries, particularly broken bones and contusions from falling rock were frequently observed. Between 25,000 and 30,000 people (50-55% of the populations) were left homeless by the earthquake/landslide and significant damage was caused to the limited road network and electricity/communication infrastructure.

13. Locals in Pattan subdistrict identified shelter as their priority need. Absent assistance, they claimed that it will be impossible for many to survive the upcoming winter. In their view, between 4000 and 5000 winterized tents or alternative shelters would be necessary to meet the need in this area. Only a few hundred tents had arrived in the subdistrict. Locals expressed a willingness to build alternative shelter if provided with needed tools, but were very concerned that it would be impossible to complete such shelters before significant snowfall began in the area.

14. The equitable distribution of the limited available supplies within Kohistan was a significant concern. Military relief flights have been turning over all goods to the local governments for distribution (in contrast to other areas where direct distribution by the military is the norm). Local military commanders attributed this decision to a lack of personnel to handle distributions unilaterally. According to locals, the district, subdistrict, and union council nazims have been distributing supplies based on political and family affiliation rather than need. For example, close relatives of the district nazim had been provided with several roles of plastic sheeting despite having suffered no damage to their houses. That sheeting was now for sale in the local market. In addition, locals claimed that the Provincial Revenue Minister had been channeling all provincial (and to the extent that he could) federal relief goods towards Palas subdistrict (his home constituency). They adamantly maintained that conditions in that subdistrict were far better than in theirs (due to time constraints, OIC could not visit Palas).

15. Despite their concerns over distribution, locals were effusive in their praise for relief flights organized by the Pakistani and American militaries) their only source of assistance to date. In contrast, they were dismissive of UN entities and NGOs who they maintained had not been seen in the region. OIC observed that northern Shangla and Kohistan were virtually devoid of the presence of any NGOs and IOs (in contrast to other areas where they are much in evidence). Similarly, locals were disappointed by the absence of relief efforts from Islamist parties in the district. Neither JI nor JUI-F had relief camps in the Pattan subdistrict despite steadfast political support for these parties from locals. Locals claimed to be reevaluating whether these parties merited their support in future.

16. The Pakistan military was aware of the serious deficit in relief supplies reaching southern Kohistan. OIC spoke with NWFP Chief of Relief Operations, Maj. Gen. Shakil who was visiting the district by helicopter on the same day. Shakil

admitted that supplies had been inadequate, largely because the military had not previously obtained a clear picture of need in the area. Shakil instructed his officers to send six relief flights per day to Pattan over the following week. Military officials in Mansehra claimed that a portion of those were sent but that they included largely food and NFIs not shelter. Shakil stressed that absent an IO/NGO presence in the district, the army would be hard-pressed to meet the significant needs in the area.

17. Comment: Due to the comparatively less damage in Kohistan, NGOs and IOs have yet to focus on this area. While we agree that needs are unquestionably greater in other areas of the NWFP, complete neglect of this area is of significant concern, especially given the typically harsh winters and a lack of viable alternatives for most of the population. The Pakistan military seems genuine in its desire to assist, but is also cognizant that its resources are limited and cannot meet the needs without outside assistance. Nepotism has certainly complicated relief efforts in the area, but is likely an outgrowth of limited resources and may well evaporate with significant relief supplies. We believe that additional focus on Kohistan needs to be a priority for the international community. End Comment.

18. Embassy Islamabad is transmitting this cable on behalf of FOB Mansehra.
CROCKER